



## **Russia: Key to the Commonwealth**

The Russian Federation has 89 administrative units--21 republics, 6 territories, 49 regions, 2 federal cities and 11 autonomous states. It has 11 borders with other states, more than any other country in the world. It is larger and more powerful than any other CIS member. Most of Russia lies within the Eurasian Plain, a great plain with gentle rolling land. West of the Ural mountains, it is called the Russian Plain, east of the Urals, it is called the West Siberian Plain. Russia also has the world's longest coastline, but only a small part is useful because most of it is icebound for much of the year. The severe climate, with brutally cold winters and hot summers, results from the fact that ocean breezes do not reach much of Russia.

Russia contains 75% of CIS territory, 52 % of its population, and 62% of its gross domestic product. It produces about 90% of its oil, 77% of its natural gas, 55 % of its coal, 54 % of its grain, 53% of its total food, and 55 % of its non-food consumer goods. Russia also has the largest timber resources in the world, and rich deposits of rare metals such as chromium, manganese, platinum, cobalt, and vanadium. The overwhelming majority of the population, 82%, is Russian, although there are at least 40 sizable nationalities represented, each with its own common origin, language, and traditions. The most active have been the Tatars, a group descended from the Mongols that make up 4% of the population and who have pushed for more local control.

In recent years, Russia has faced problems with its economy caused by the change from a centrally controlled and planned situation to a free-market economy. Private farming was encouraged and price controls on most products were ended. Prices and unemployment rose and many people, especially the elderly and others on fixed incomes, suffered. Reforms brought help from other nations in the form of loans. There have been bright spots too! Supplies of food have increased and foreign investment has brought money and expertise into the country.

Industrial and agricultural pollution is among the worst in the world. In the industrial city of Magnitogorsk in Russia's Ural mountains, 34% of all adults and 60% of all children suffer from respiratory illnesses as a result of pollution from the steel mills. Agricultural pollution has also taken a toll. Pesticides and herbicides have poisoned both the land and the people who live in the areas they are used. The Volga, Russia's longest river, is blocked by dams and polluted by industrial wastes.

Russia and other CIS republics had nuclear weapons. There was a dangerous possibility after the end of the Soviet Union that these could fall into the hands of unfriendly groups, including terrorists. With the help of the UN, most shipped their weapons to

Russia, with the Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan agreeing to give up long-range weapons by the end of the 1990s.

Russia must continue to reform its economy, improve the standard of living with its people and continue friendly relations with governments within the CIS and in other parts of the world. The rich variety in the geography can be used to help solve problems. Its size, range of climate and different vegetation zones, and numerous natural resources can be managed to reduce pollution and and make Russia an environmentally safe place to live. If the economy can include industries and services that are in the business of cleaning up the environment, many people would have jobs and a safer place to live. If the government makes sure that foreign investors do not pollute, this will help too.

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Challenges facing the CIS

Republic	Geographic Data	Challenges	Meeting challenges
Russia	Physical features  Resources  Population		
	Physical features  Resources  Population		
	Physical features  Resources  Population		

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## **Requirements for report on a CIS Republic:**

One to two paragraphs--basic geographic information on physical features, natural resources, and population (numbers and different ethnic groups).

One to two paragraphs--description of the challenges facing the republic.

One paragraph--how the geography of the republic affects its ability to meet those challenges.

**TR-1**

## **Selected Internet Sites**

<http://www.odci.gov/cia> —CIA Factbook provides information on each country

<http://www.geopedia.com> —provides information on each country

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html>

<http://worldbank.org>